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ABSTRACT

Teachers should note that revision is an integral part of the writing process and that writers use revision in various ways. In some cases, revision means rewriting--beginning at the end to discover the real focus of the paper and how to organize it for the greatest effect. In other cases, revision may mean simply polishing by deleting, adding, and substituting. Teachers can help students realize the importance of revision and its many uses by having students write an opening paragraph to an essay, exchange paragraphs with classmates, and have the readers provide the writers with one sentence restatements of the perceived thesis of the paragraph. In this way, the writer learns the importance of writing as a communication project rather than a mere exercise. The habit of revision is also established by rewriting paragraphs whose intent did not get through to the reader. Teachers can also ask students to edit other students' essays. This procedure creates a sequence of two assignments that, coupled with teacher/writer and teacher/editor conferences, illustrates the value of revision within the composing process. (A checklist is attached for students to use when evaluating, editing, and revising their work.) (RL)

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REVISION
by
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Revision is more than re-reading a work. It is, as the name indicates, a new vision--a second vision--of the communication. The writing process does not terminate with the last period of the composition. Instead revision is an integral part of the process. It may be that the second look at the writing indicates that not until he reached the conclusion did the author decide or discover what he wanted to say. In that case, revision means rewriting--starting over again, beginning at the end. In other cases "revision" may mean simply polishing by deleting, adding, substituting, or replacing. Revising, then, encompasses many writing skills and many processes. It may be simple or complex, minor or major. Regardless of the extent of the revision, it is an integral, vital, necessary phase of the writing process.

If writing is indeed a discovery, then the writer often does not make the discovery of his point, view, or stand until he has finished composing. Sometimes this is good. The student might be writing a deductive or inductive theme and discover what he wants to say as he progresses through the logical process. Most often students write before they think and so do not fully grasp the point until they reach their final paragraph. If this happens, then at the revision stage, the student is ready

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to begin all over again at the point of his discovery and write the theme from his discovery, which becomes his central idea. At this point, an entirely different revision procedure is necessary for the second rendition.

Another instance when revision means rewriting is explained by Donald Hall in his WRITING WELL. Hall sees revision, a second writing, necessary for a writer to write in his "real voice," speaking out of his own experience, using his own language, "with a minimum of tired phrases, of borrowed clichés" (p. 10). Hall cites examples of a student who wrote the first draft of a paper on "How I Came to College." In the first draft, which was spontaneous, the student pulled material and phrases from his "cliché collection in the why-I-want-to-go-to-college box," using such expressions as "paramount importance," "today's youth," and "well-rounded individual." Later in the term, the student made a complete revision of this first draft, <u>showing</u> with an anecdote instead of <u>telling</u>, revealing his true feelings. His revised version rings with the voice of a real person speaking out of his own experience as he expresses his experience in his own language in disciplined, tightly-knit sentences unified through the experience he came to recognize. As in this case, all writing needs revision for honestly and sincerity. First drafts are the material that must be shaped, the block of marble that the critical brain chisels into form. Good writing is an intricate interweaving of inspiration and discipline. Writers must <u>invent</u> and <u>revise</u>. In these double acts of invention and

revision, writers are inventing and revising not just their prose style but their knowledge of themselves and of the people around them. They are getting through to themselves, cutting out clichés and standard reactions. Discovery, then, is an important part of the writing process that emerges during writing and needs to be chiseled finely with critical intelligence in the revising stage.

In other cases, revision may not entail complete rewriting. The person who does careful pre-planning, thinking through his material clearly, may need to revise for organization, unity, adequate development, sentence structure, and mechanics--the components of composition. In this case, complete rewriting is not necessary, but many revisions may need to be made. This kind of revision necessitates several re-readings--one for each component. Revisions are best done after the work has cooled, after the writer has gained a perspective. This type of revision encompasses several re-readings. First, the writer approaches his paper with the question: What did I want to say? He reads the paper through to see if he said what he meant to say. As we know, writers often make leaps by private association or omit steps in thinking or use bad logic or over-explain the obvious or include irrelevant detail or use ambiguous words or commit any number of similar errors. In the revision to see if he said what he meant to say, the writer notes and corrects these slips. This first reading is really a holistic evaluation of the paper. When the writer is assured that he said

what he meant to say--that he developed his subject fully, clearly, and logically--then he re-reads the paper to check other components of composition. He may even read the paper aloud to test the rhythm and tone. In this type of revision, the writer shifts roles from author to editor. He divorces himself emotionally from the work to view it through the cold eyes of his teacher. He is author turned critic. Even if he finds on his first re-reading that he has to re-write his work completely, this revision process to check components is necessary for the revised version.

We ran two interesting experiments at Georgia Tech on the revision process. One experiment we conducted while holding workshops to prepare students for the essay portion of the compulsory English competency examination. We gave students seven minutes to write an opening paragraph which included a central idea on an assigned topic. Then we asked each student to exchange papers with his neighbor. The neighbor read the paragraph and in one sentence wrote what he thought the writer said. Papers were returned to the authors who checked to see if the reader got the intended message. If the reader did not, the author looked to see where he went wrong--why he failed to make his point. He then rewrote his paragraph and discussed it with a workshop leader. Here students became impressed with the prime criterion for writing--communication. Often students cannot see the forest for the trees; they get so bogged down in modes of development or in subject-verb agreement or some other

component that they fail to focus on the purpose of writing. Students learned through this revision process the importance of writing as a communication project as well as an exercise.

Another experiment consisted of students editing others' essays. Neither of these experiments is new or startling: I present them as a challenge or at least a reminder of the possibilities of the revision process. Like many of you, I taught two 1001 classes back to back. These first quarter English courses dealt solely with composition. I alone graded the first two essays; then when the students felt they knew what was expected of them, I gave both sections the same assignment. Before I graded the papers, I handed them out to students not in the writer's class. These students edited in pencil and then wrote an evaluative paragraph at the end of the paper. They initialed their work so that they would feel ~~more~~ responsible. I then graded the papers and the editing. In my comments to the author, I pointed out where and why I agreed or disagreed with the editor. When the editor's and my criticism disagreed, I conferred with the editor. In an effort to keep these editors honest and blameless, I erased their initials before returning the paper to the author. With a student's reaction and a teacher's reaction to his paper, the author felt he had a strong basis for revision--revision not derived from a teacher's hang-ups, but revision derived from two readers' reactions.

End-of-the-quarter evaluations voiced the students' enthusiastic approval of this procedure. I had feared that the

student authors would resent having their papers read by other students or that the editors would be too harsh or too easy. I was wrong in both cases. Student authors welcomed comments from fellow students, and editors followed my example and instructions to offer comments on both good and bad aspects of the paper and on the effect of the paper as a whole as well as of individual parts. Editors acquired a clearer conception of how to write effectively and thus strengthened their ability to read critically their own as well as others' compositions. Their revision technique was thereby sharpened. Authors, too, felt the added incentive to proofread and revise before handing in their paper because they knew the paper would pass through the hands of two critics. Writing thus became a weightier matter than simply fulfilling an assignment--

<u>fait accompli</u>.

Some typical student evaluations are:

> Organization and development of essay are good. Each point is logical and well explained. Transitions are good and the paper flows well. A narrative ~~point of~~ first person gives the paper good personal feelings. Spelling needs working on.
>
> 4th sentence in 2nd paragraph is run-on.
> 1st sentence in 3rd paragraph is run-on.
> 4th paragraph rambles on without clear subject or thought.
> 2nd paragraph states that pocket camera is a good choice, but the 3rd paragraph tells of complications involved in using one.
> It would be better if an actual situation were described.
> In several places commas are omitted, but you seem to have real interest in your subject.
>
> This essay gives a more vivid and interesting definition of charm than the essay in CONTEMPORARY READER. I particularly liked the way in which charm was described in general for men, women, and children and

then the specific description of one person, Mike Fuller. (Would Mike Fuller run for President??)

I think it is a delightful essay. "Entity" was perhaps used too many times, but in general word choice was excellent.

Some student evaluations favoring the procedure are:

I liked having another student criticize my paper. His point of view helped.

Having someone else read my paper was a good idea. I learned to consider the audience and really wanted to get my points across and write a good paper.

Since revision is so important, I have compiled from several sources a check-list for students to use in their final step of the composing process. I am sure you have better ideas, but I hope this handout will be a springboard for you to use with your students in emphazing not only the importance of, but indeed the necessity of, revision.

Jonathan Swift's quotation seems appropriate here:

Blot out, correct, insert, refine,
Enlarge, diminish interline;
Be mindful, when invention fails,
To scratch your head, and bite your nails.

Helen Naugle
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REVISION CHART

Paper as a whole: questions to ask when you examine your draft--be it the first, second, third, or ?--

I. Does the paper say what I meant? Does it develop the assigned topic? Does it have a central idea (can I summarize it in one sentence)? Is it honest and heartfelt? Are the points fully developed? Is the introduction interesting? Does the conclusion wrap up the ideas presented, reiterating the main idea?

II. Who and What? How and why? When? Where?

- A. Are all references clear? Specific?
- B. Are time sequences indicated?

III. Clear organization

- A. Do the topics have a discernible sequence?
- B. Are all topics developed fully?
- C. Can each paragraph be expressed in a topic sentence?

IV. Clear sentences

- A. Do thoughts progress as steps in a ladder from sentence to sentence to clarify or exemplify the main idea?
- B. Do connectives indicate proper relationship between parts of sentences?
- C. Are sentences succinct and powerful?
- D. Is the relationship between sentences made clear by means of transitional devices?
- E. Can some sentences be combined into more interesting ones?

V. Clear diction

- A. Do the words say what you want them to say in the tone you want?
- B. Have you avoided pompous diction, slang, cliches, and unnecessary verbage?
- C. Are all words spelled correctly?
- D. Are all modifiers necessary, fresh, and vivid?
- E. Are nouns and verbs specific, dynamic, colorful, and accurate?

VI. Grammar, shifts, voice

- A. Is each sentence a sentence? A single sentence?
- B. Are grammatical constructions correct? (subject-verb; noun-pronoun agreement, etc.)
- C. Are pronoun references clear?
- D. Are tense sequences, point of view, and tone?
- E. Are most verbs active voice and action verbs rather than passive voice and bland forms of the verb to be?

VII. Punctuation

A. Can you quote a rule for each mark of punctuation you used?
B. Read your work aloud. Do you need punctuation where none appears?
C. Are apostrophes, capitals, and underlining where they are needed?